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(54) **DIAGNOSTIC DEVICE FOR TUBULAR ANATOMICAL STRUCTURES**

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See application file for complete search history.

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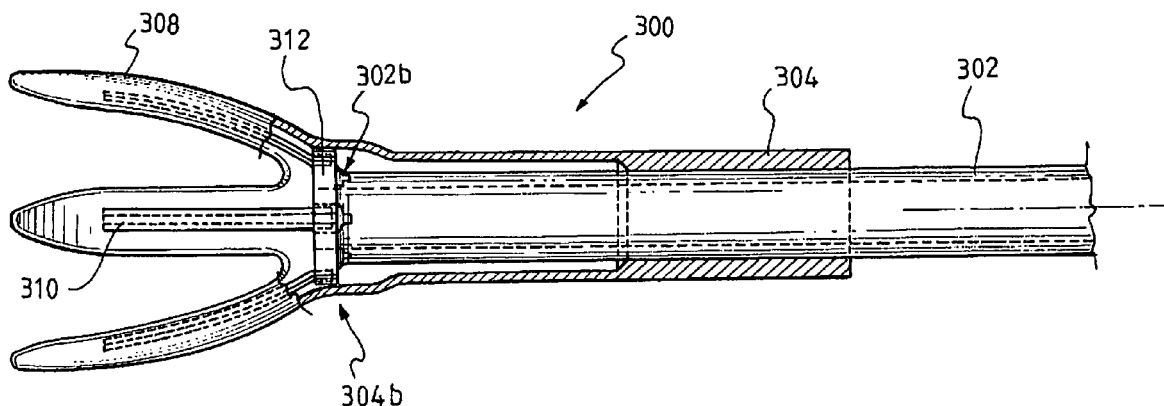
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A diagnostic device (10) for pathologies of tubular anatomical structures comprises a tubular elongated structure (12, 28) developing between a proximal end and a distal end and is adapted to be inserted in the tubular anatomical structure, means (22) for locally dilating the walls of the tubular anatomical structure being associated with the distal end of said elongated structure, said means for locally dilating being movable between a closed position for introducing the device and at least one open position for viewing and evaluating the pathology, and control means being associated with the proximal end of the elongated structure, said control means being operatively connected to said means for locally dilating, in order to move them between the closed position and the open position, and vice versa.

13 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets



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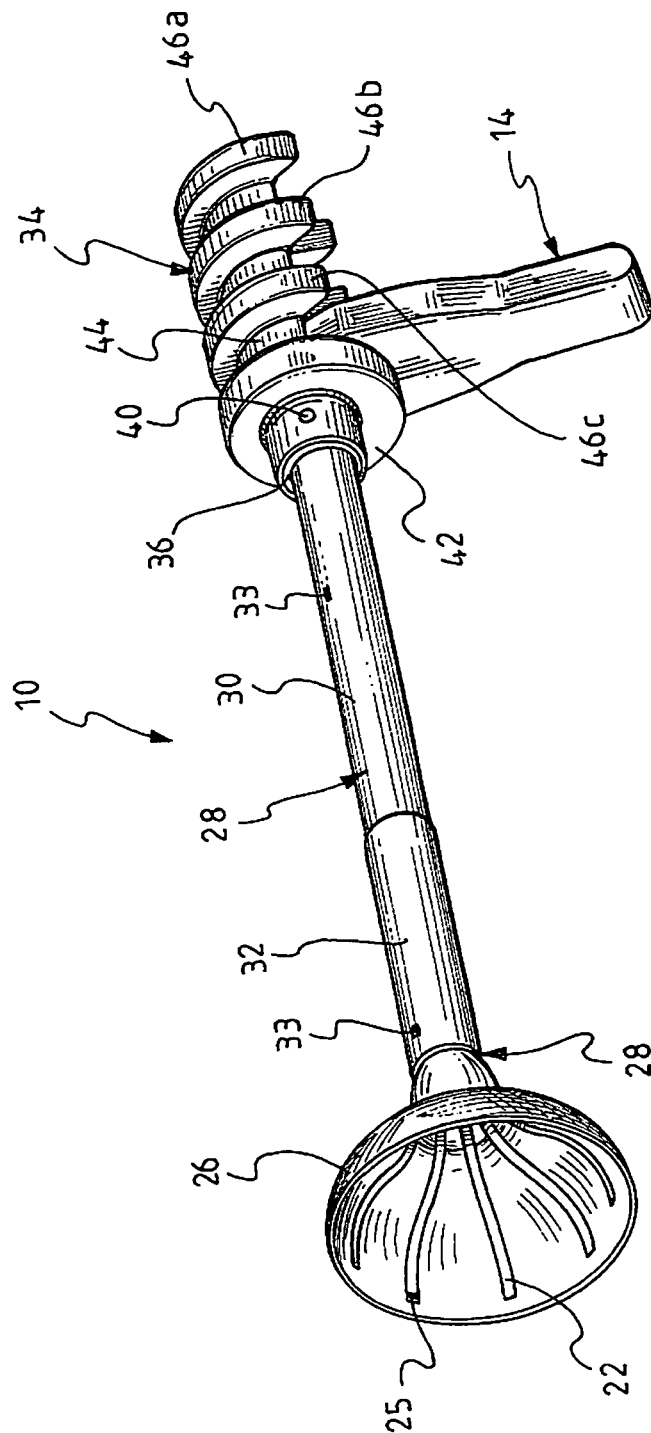
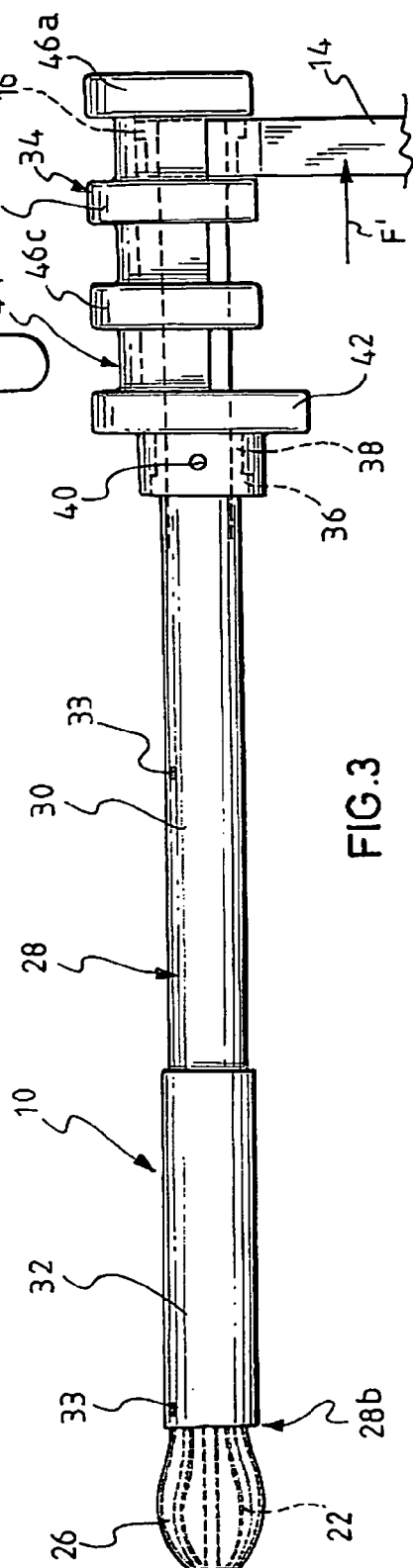
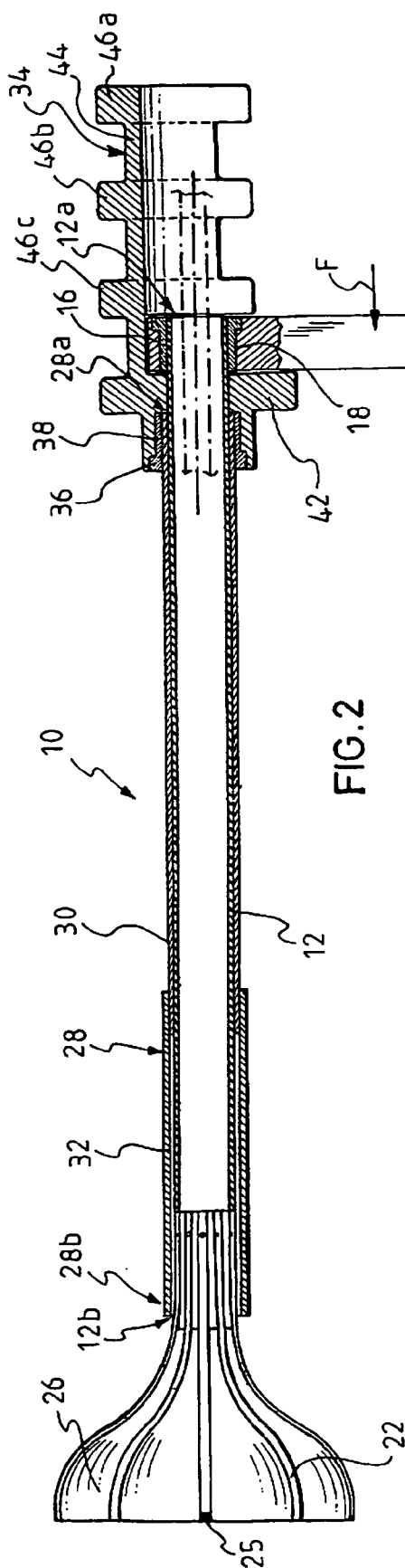
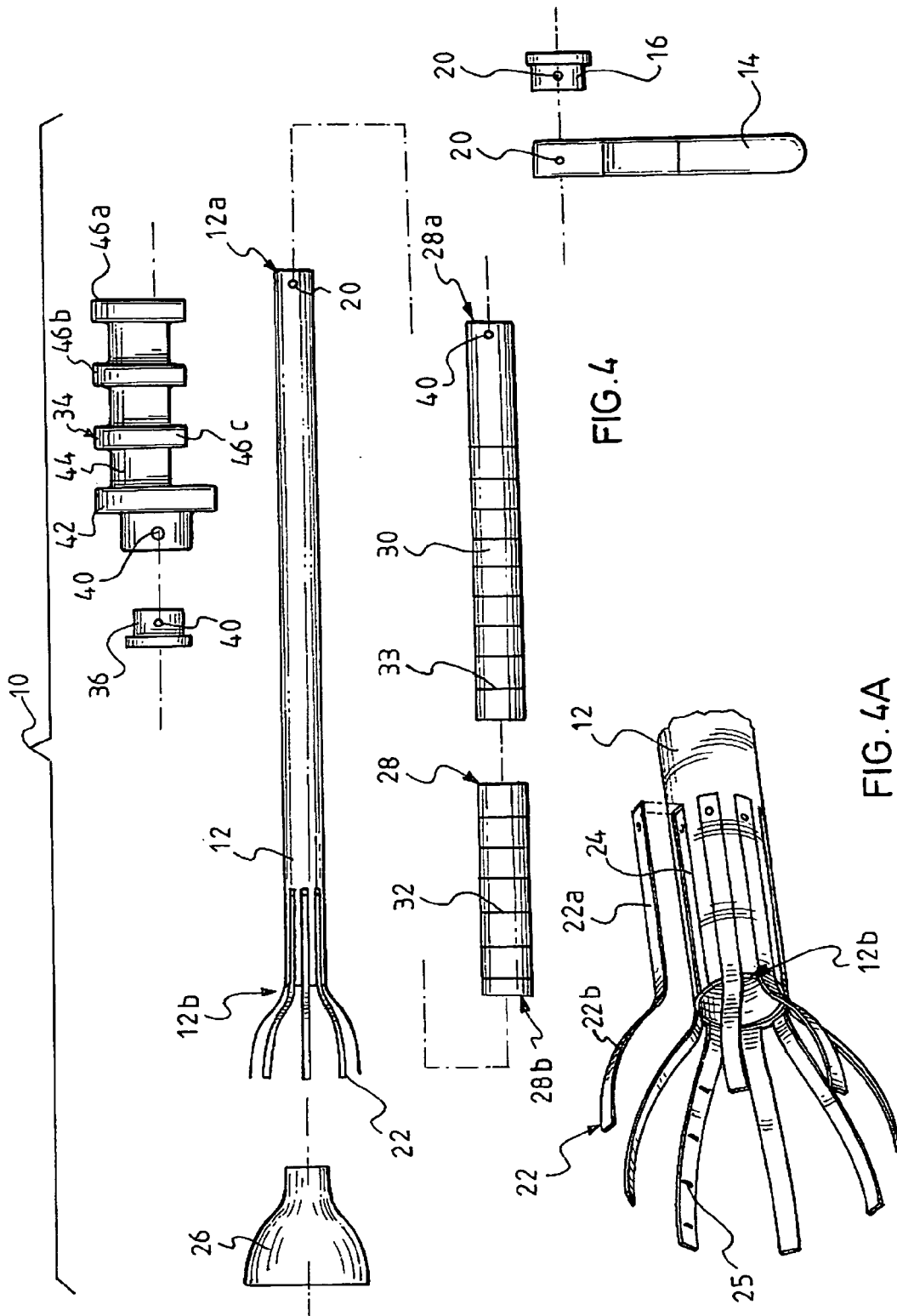


FIG.1





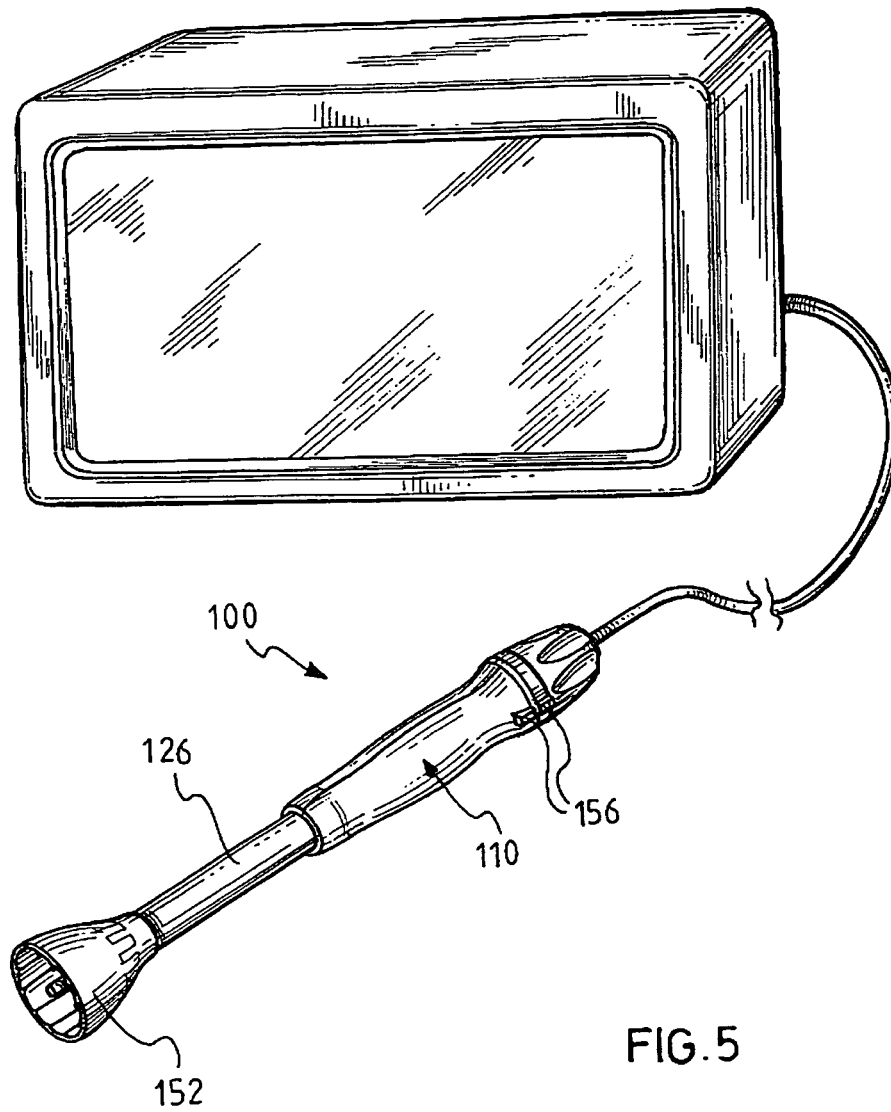


FIG. 5

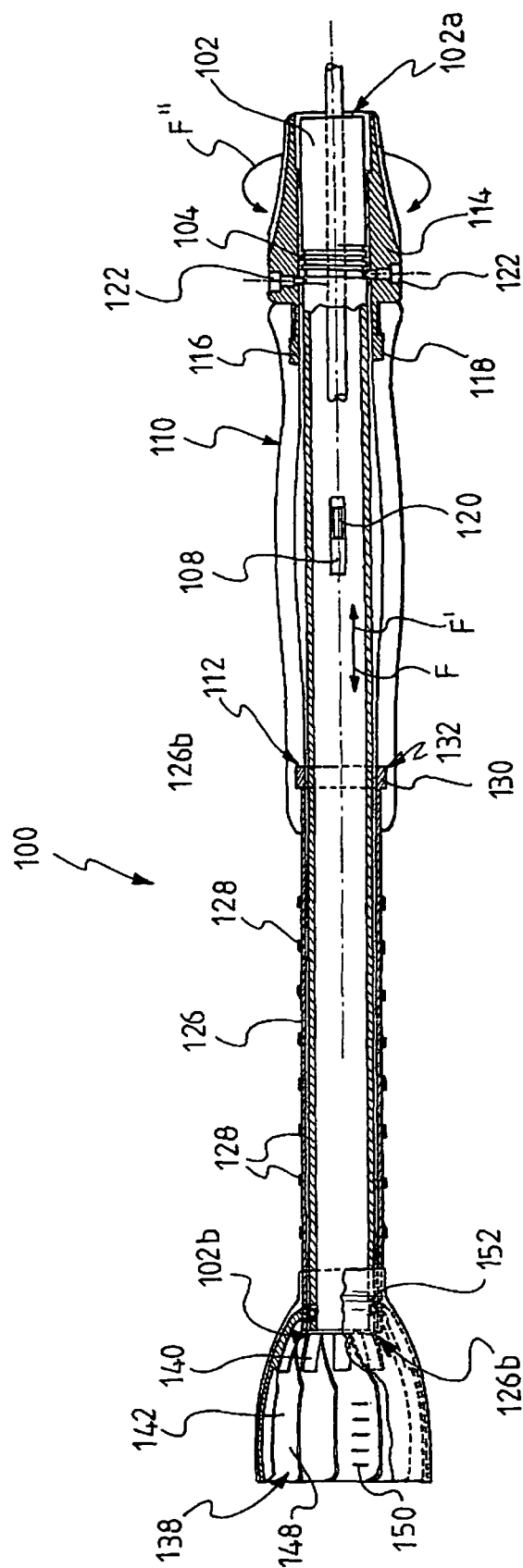
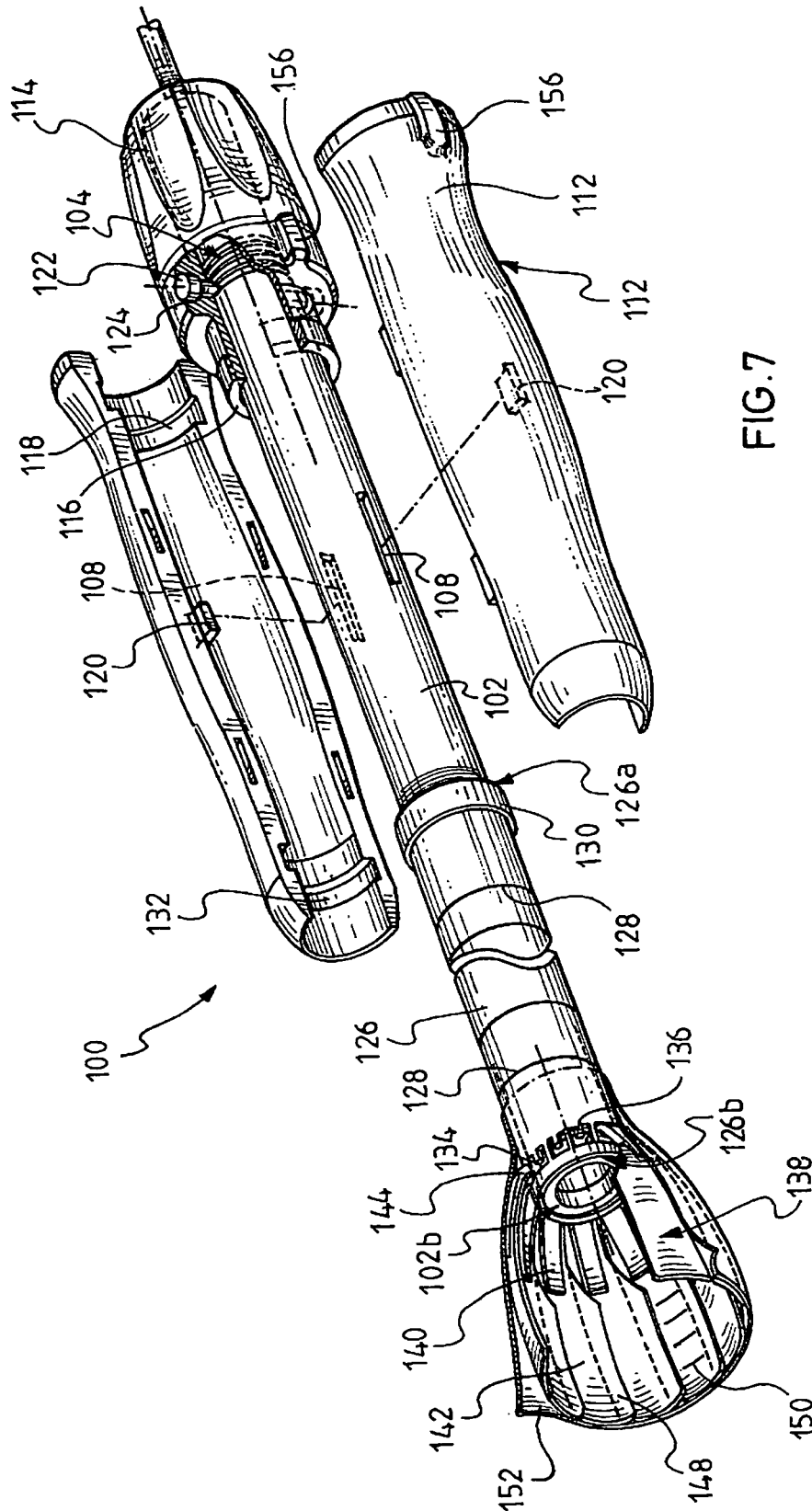
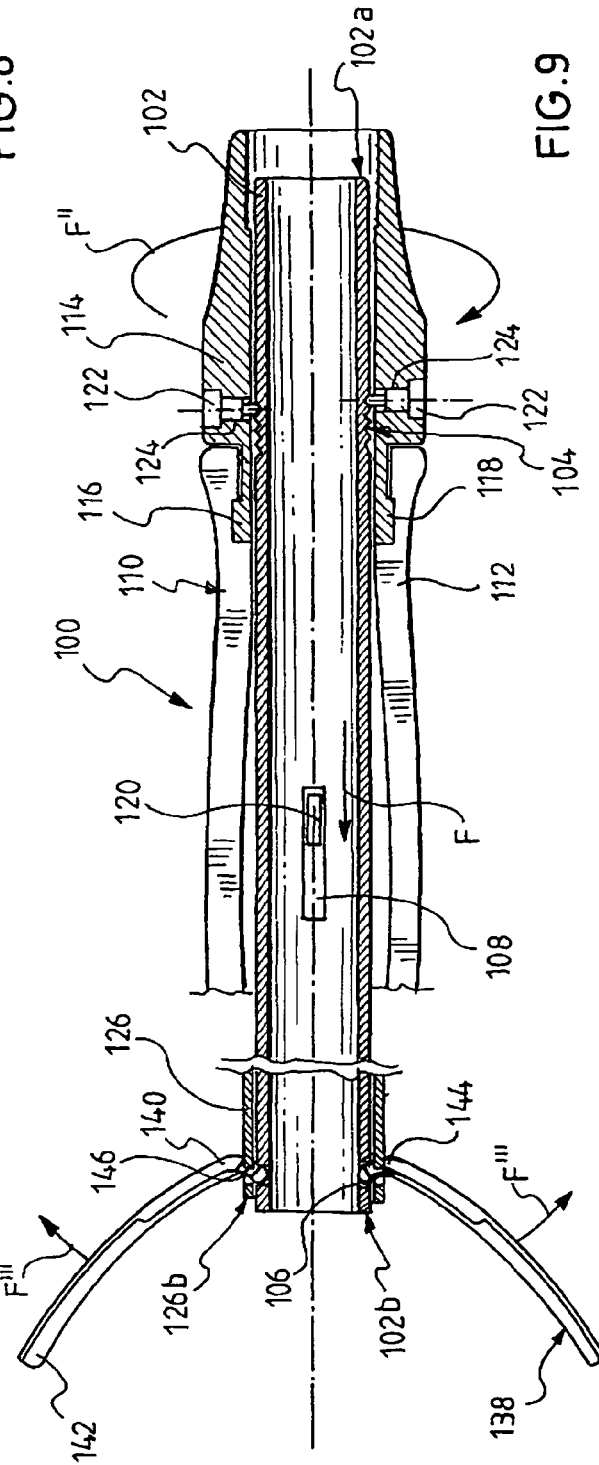
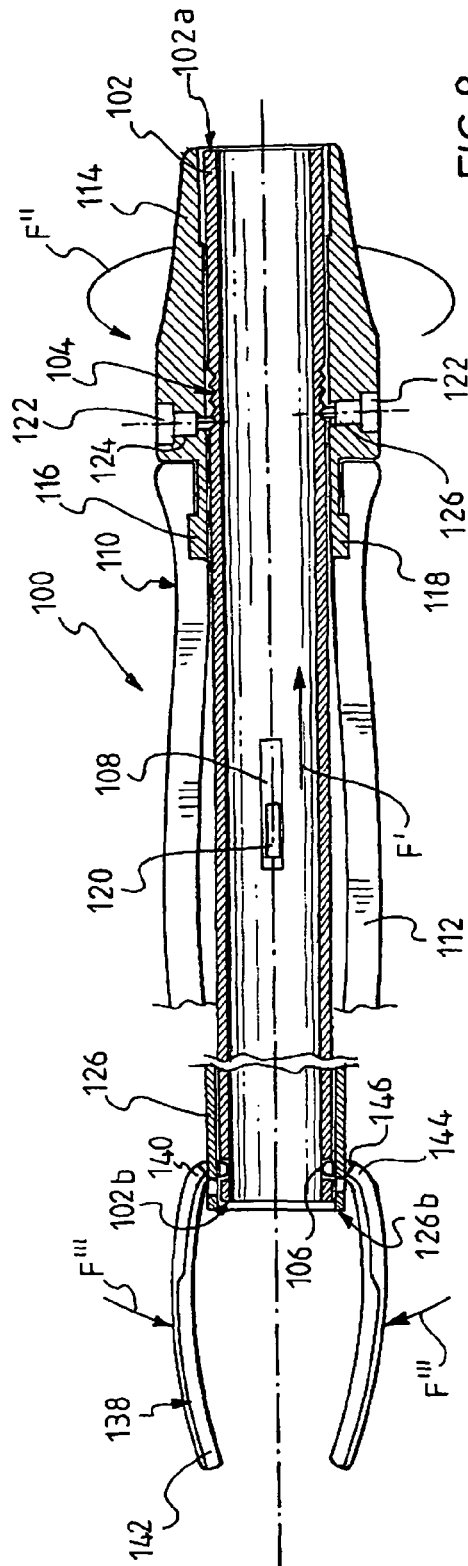


FIG. 6





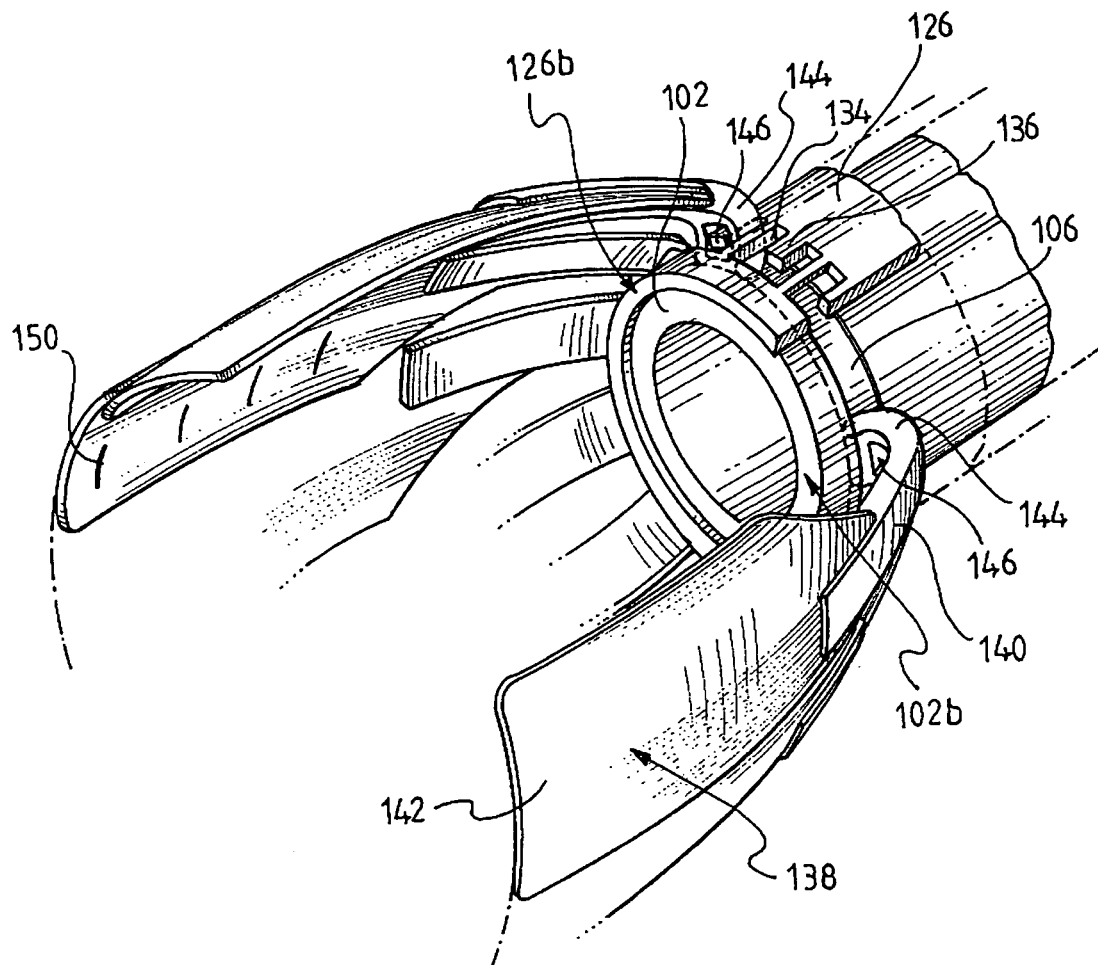


FIG.10

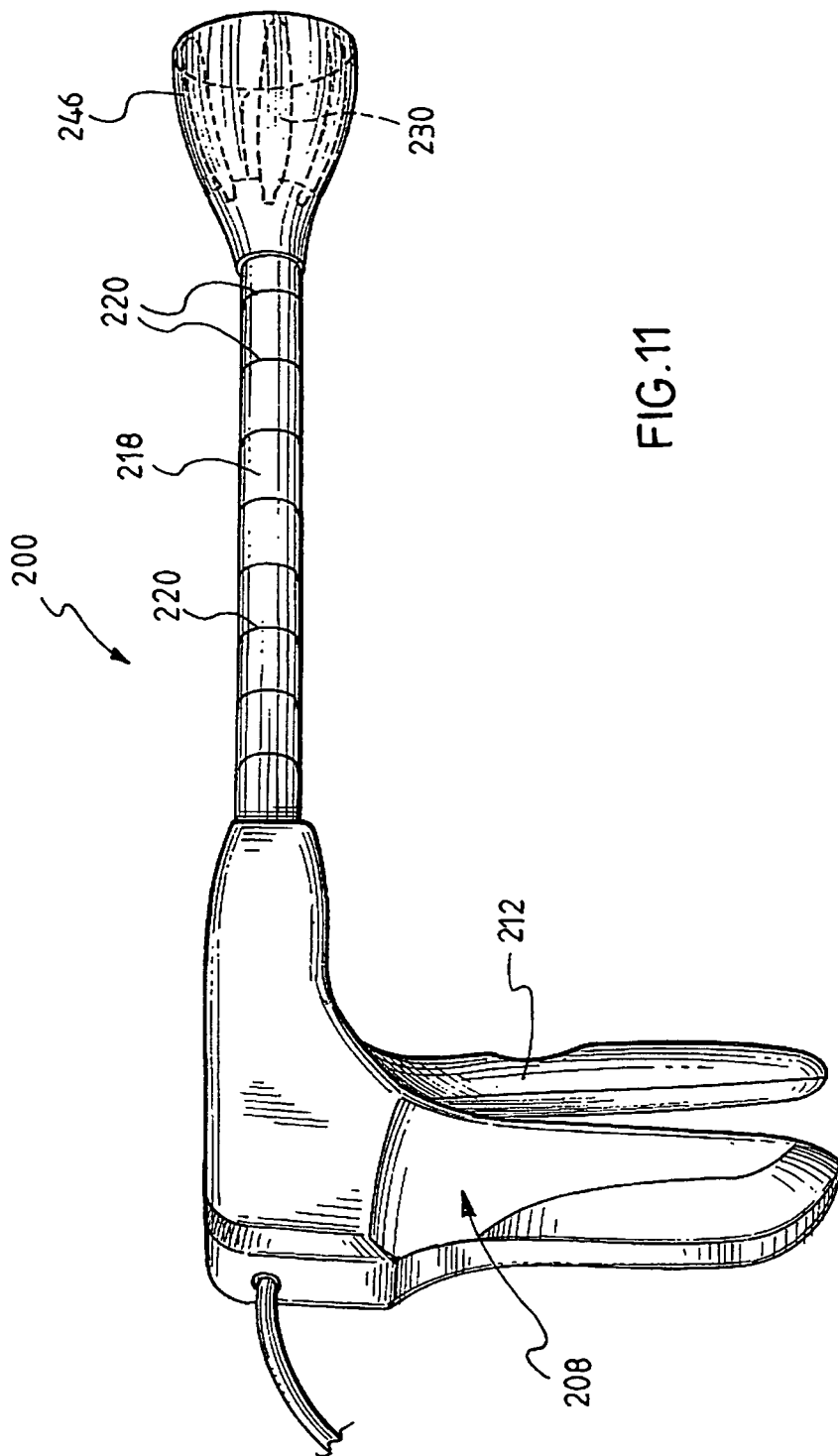


FIG. 11

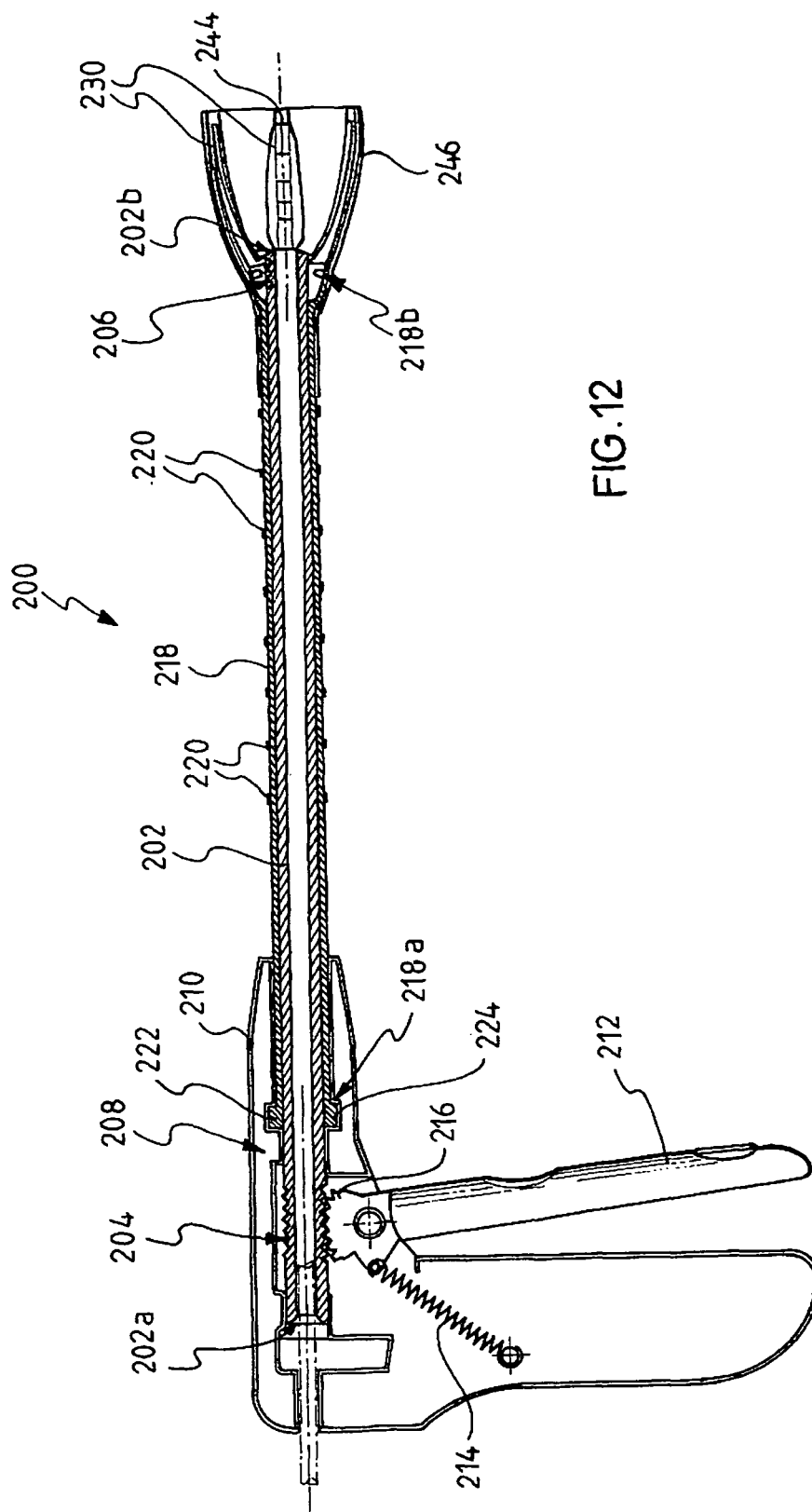
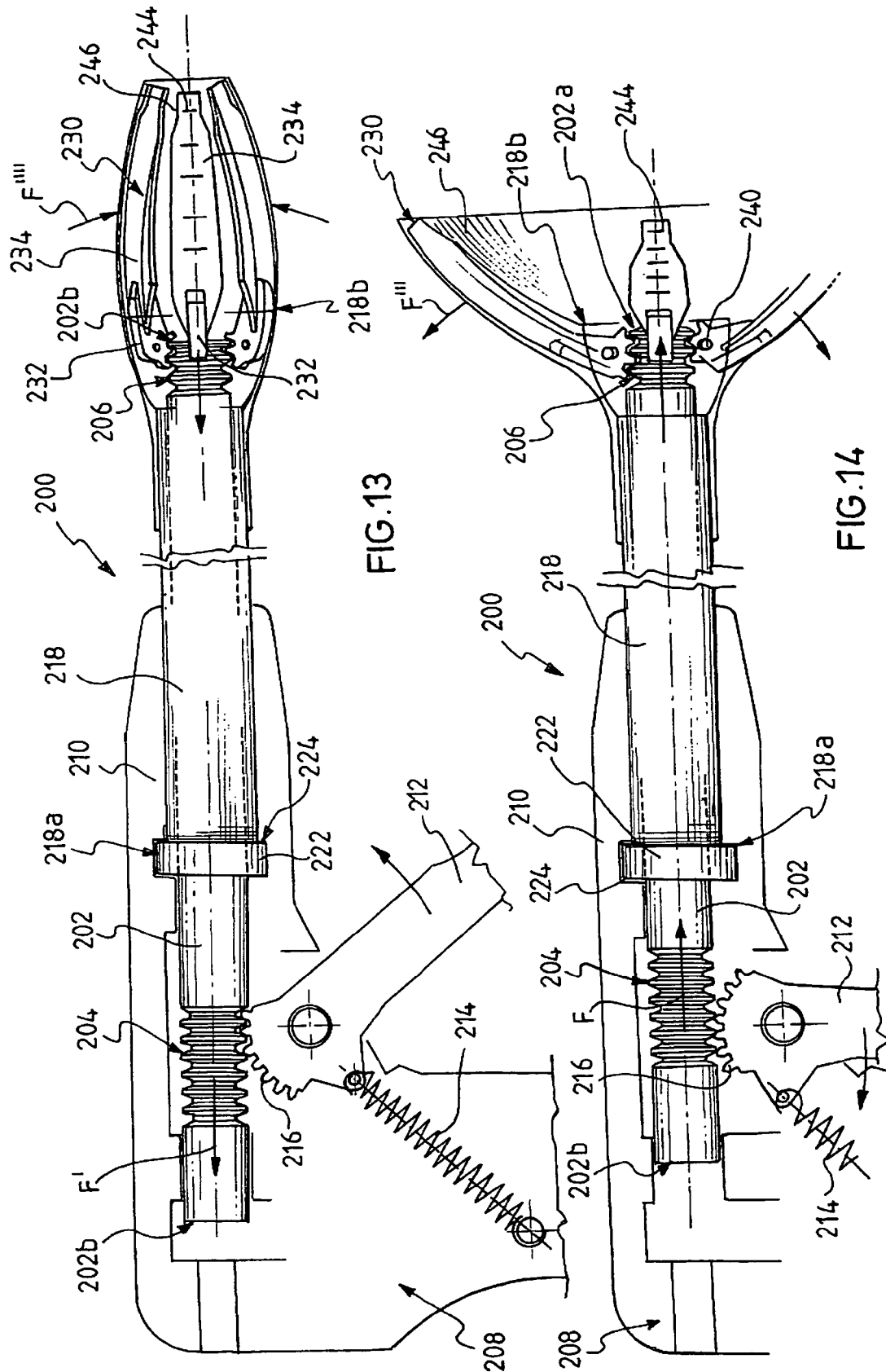
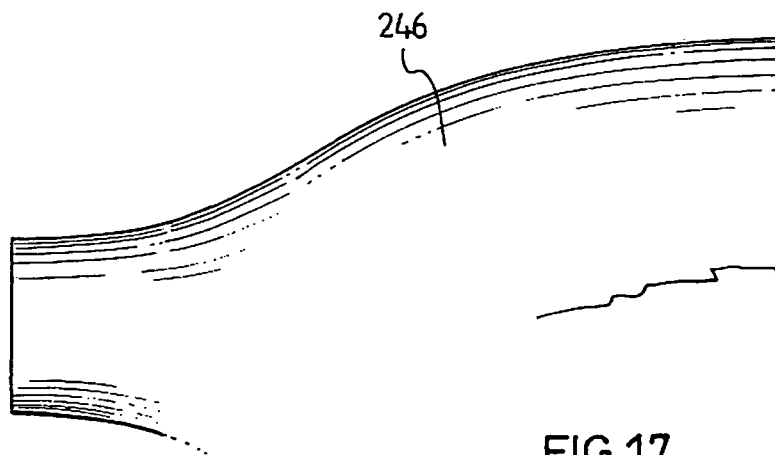
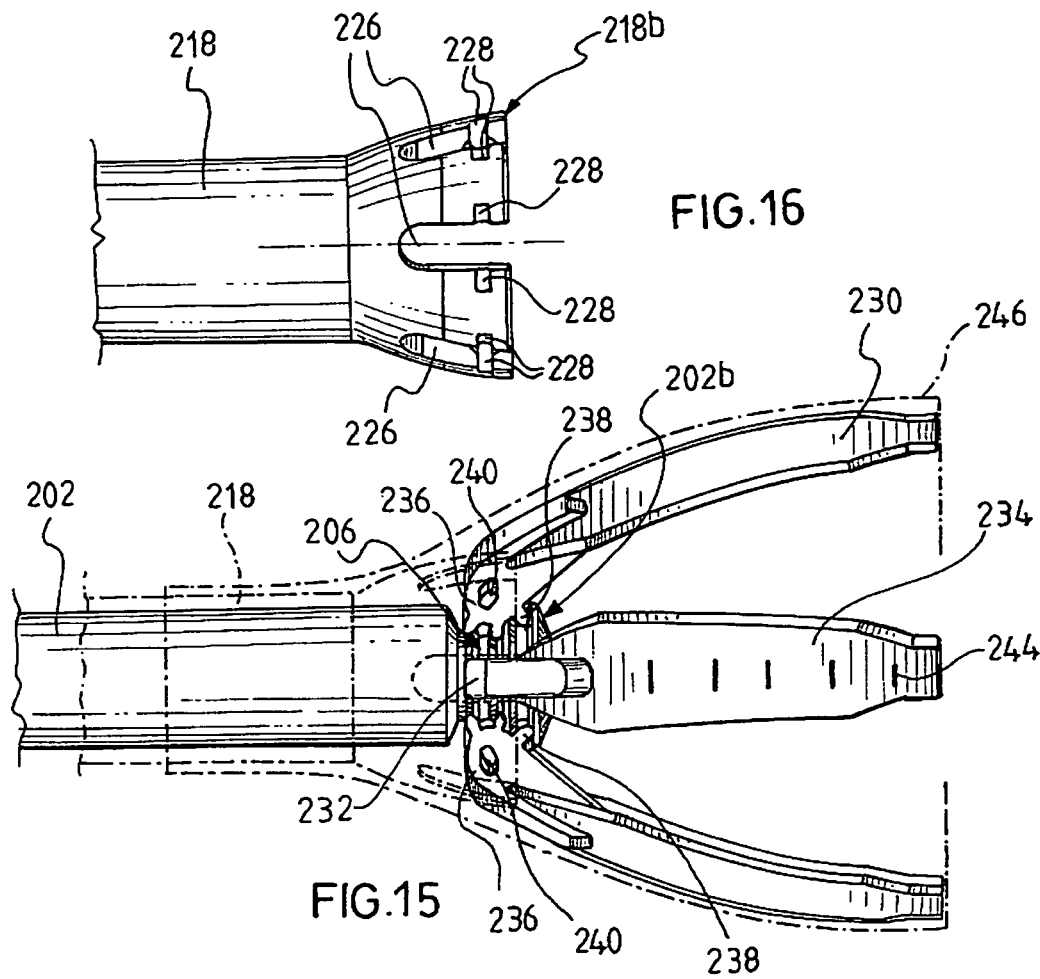
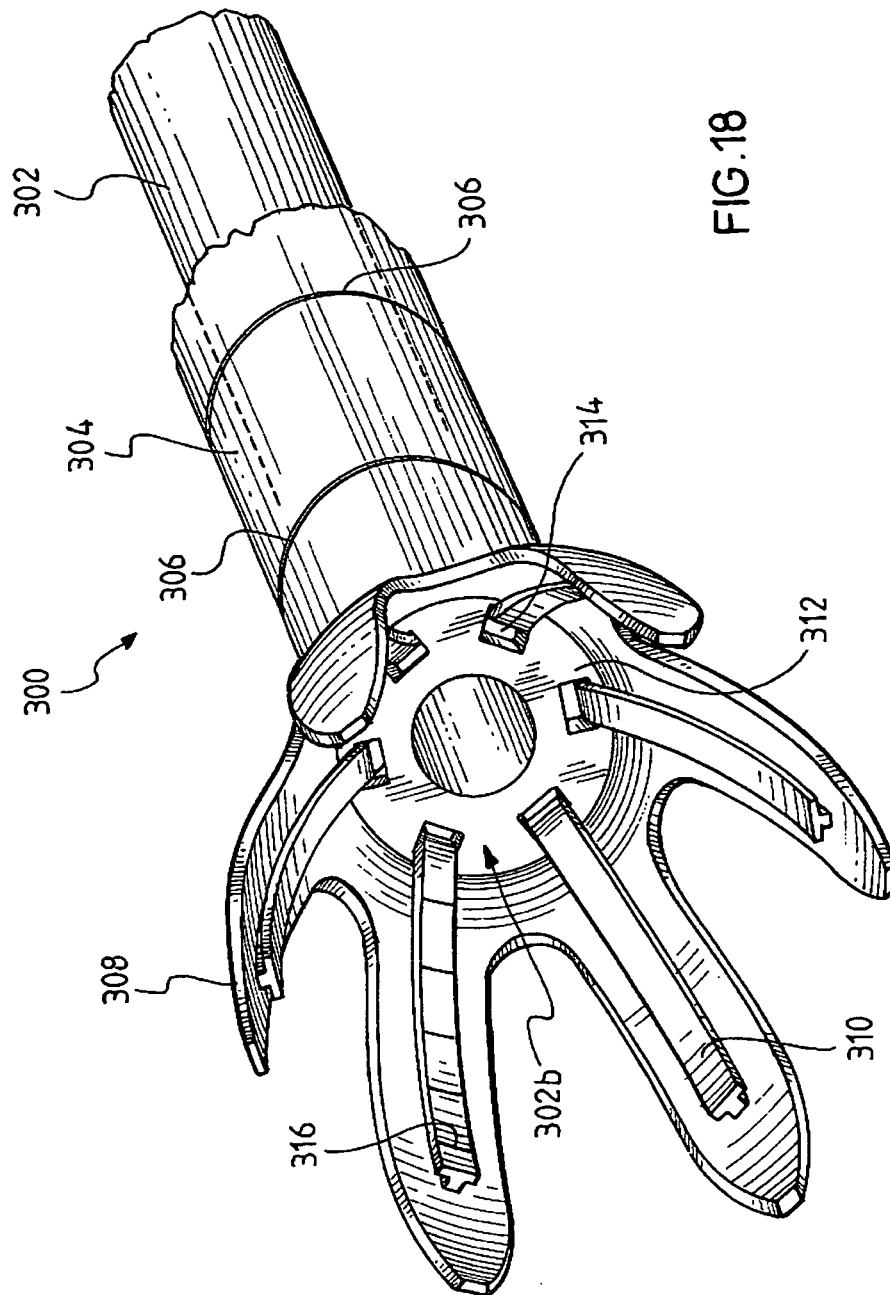


FIG. 12







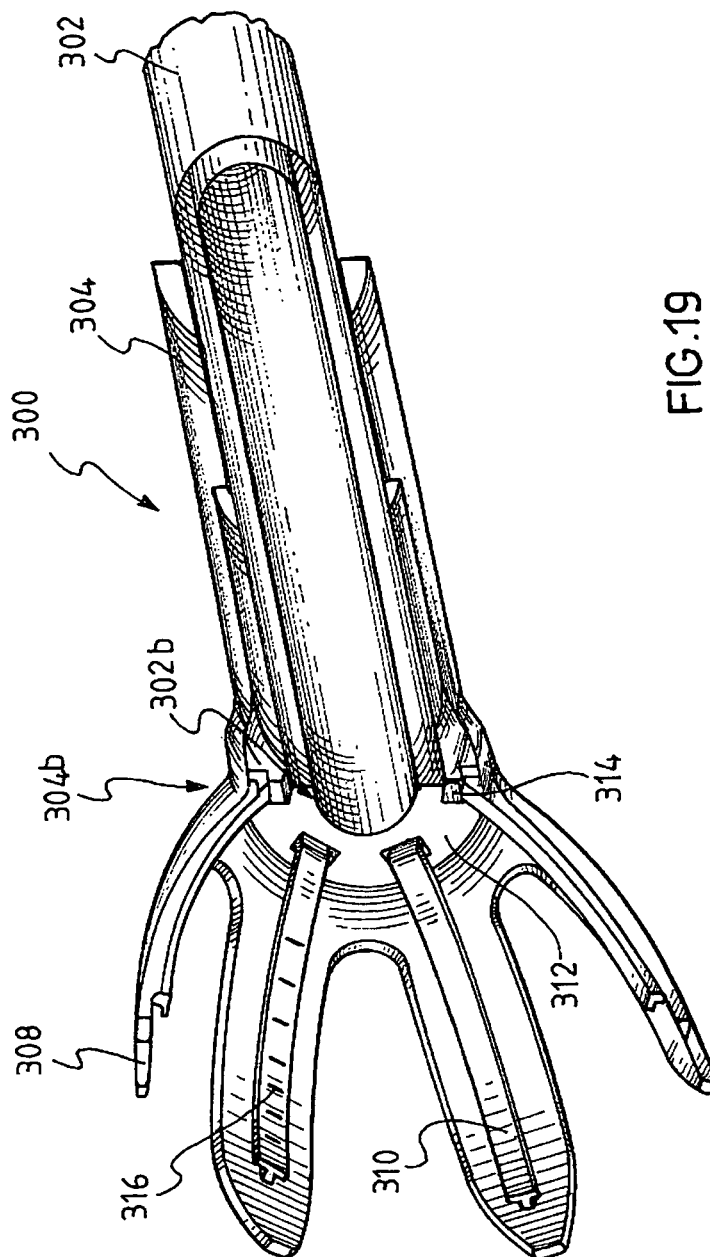
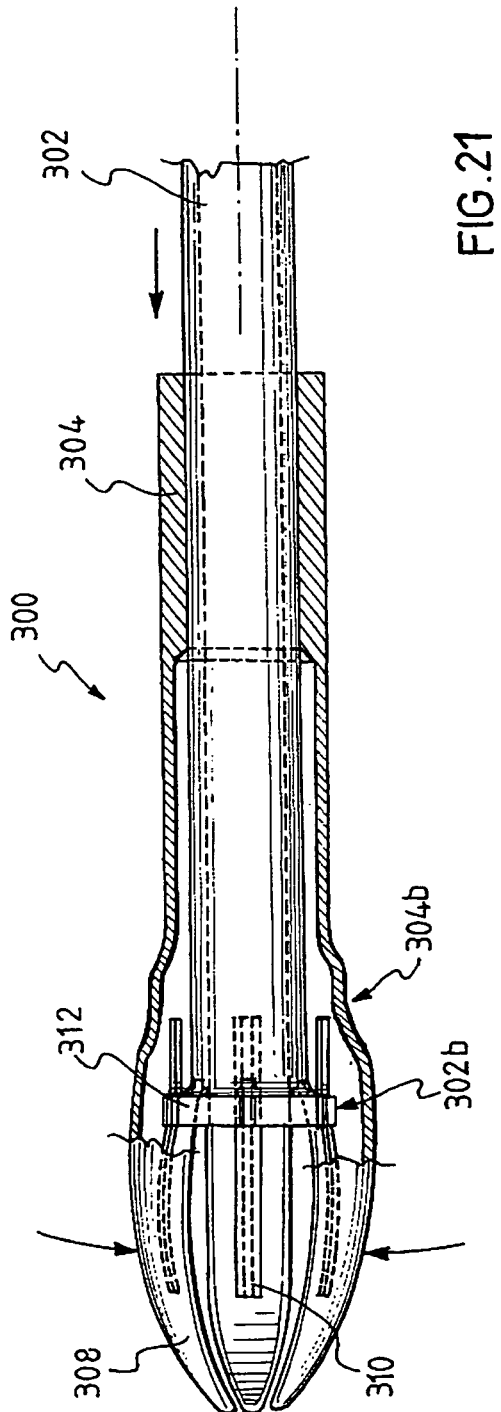
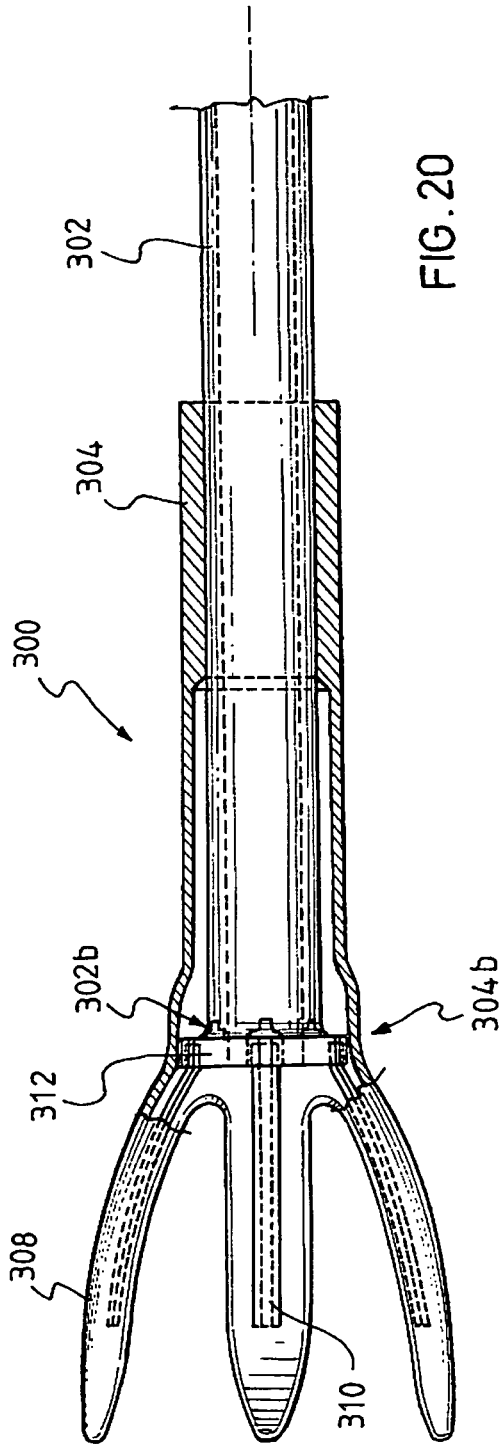


FIG. 19



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DIAGNOSTIC DEVICE FOR TUBULAR ANATOMICAL STRUCTURES

A diagnostic device for the pathologies of tubular anatomical structures, such as for example the intestinal tracts, is the subject of the present invention. In particular, the present invention refers to a diagnostic device for pathologies of the colon or the rectum such as for example intussusception, stenosis, prolapse, rectocele.

The need for the availability of a diagnostic device for the aforementioned pathologies, which is realisable with limited expense, usable even in non hospital or clinical structures and which gives rise to the least possible discomfort in patients, avoiding for example the administration of sedatives, is particularly felt within the sector. In addition, the need for the availability of a diagnostic device which allows the verification of the presence and the nature of a mucosal prolapse is particularly felt.

Diagnostic devices, such as flexible colonoscopes and sigmoidoscopes which have significant drawbacks are known. Generally, colonoscopes work by the insufflation of air in order to dilate the walls of the intestinal tract subjected to analyses. The insufflation of air gives rise to significant discomfort in the patients and frequently it is necessary to resort to the administration of sedatives. Furthermore, the insufflation of air causes dilation of the rectum with the consequence that any possible mucosal prolapse disappears and may not be viewed.

Anoscopes which allow the direct vision of the area involved and which can also be of large dimensions, for example with diameters greater than 2 cm, are also known, causing pain during insertion and requiring the relaxation of the sphincter.

Due to the complexity and the expense of the equipment required, in addition to the high discomfort which they cause in patients, frequently the only structures which are so equipped are hospitals or clinics, requiring therefore that the majority of the diagnostic procedures be carried out in such environments.

The problem at the heart of the present invention is that of proposing a diagnostic device for the pathologies of the intestinal tracts, in particular of the rectum and colon, which has structural and operational characteristics such as to satisfy the aforementioned needs and to overcome the aforementioned drawbacks cited in reference to the known art.

Such a problem is solved by a diagnostic device in agreement with claim 1. The dependent claims refer to further embodiments of the device according to the present invention.

Further characteristics and advantages of the diagnostic device according to the invention will arise from the following reported description of its preferred example embodiments, given for non-limiting indication, with reference to the attached figures, wherein:

FIG. 1 shows a perspective view of an embodiment of the diagnostic device according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 shows a partially sectional side view of the diagnostic device from FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 shows a side view of the diagnostic device from FIG. 1 in a different operating condition;

FIG. 4 shows an exploded side view of the diagnostic device from FIG. 1;

FIG. 4A shows a partial perspective view of a detail of the diagnostic device from FIG. 1, where several details have been omitted in order to enhance other ones;

FIG. 5 shows a perspective view of an embodiment of the diagnostic device according to the present invention;

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FIG. 6 shows a longitudinal sectional side view of the diagnostic device from FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 shows a partially exploded perspective view of the diagnostic device from FIG. 5, where several details have been omitted in order to enhance other ones;

FIG. 8 shows a partially sectional side view of the diagnostic device from FIG. 5;

FIG. 9 shows a partially sectional side view of the diagnostic device from FIG. 5, in a different operating condition relative to the view from FIG. 8;

FIG. 10 shows an enlarged perspective view of a detail of the diagnostic device from FIG. 5;

FIG. 11 shows a perspective view of an embodiment of the diagnostic device according to the present invention;

FIG. 12 shows a sectional side view of the diagnostic device from FIG. 11;

FIG. 13 shows an enlarged sectional side view of a detail of the diagnostic device from FIG. 11;

FIG. 14 shows the detail from FIG. 13 in a different operating condition;

FIG. 15 is an enlarged side view of a detail of the diagnostic device from FIG. 11 where several details have been represented with a dash-dot line;

FIG. 16 is an enlarged side view of a detail of the diagnostic device from FIG. 11;

FIG. 17 is a partial enlarged side view of a detail of the diagnostic device from FIG. 11;

FIG. 18 is a perspective view of a detail of a possible embodiment of the diagnostic device according to the present invention;

FIG. 19 is a partially sectional perspective view of the detail from FIG. 18;

FIG. 20 is a longitudinal sectional side view of the detail from FIG. 18 in a first operating condition;

FIG. 21 is a longitudinal sectional side view of the detail from FIG. 18 in a second operating condition.

The present invention refers generically to a diagnostic device for pathologies of tubular anatomical structures, such as the intestinal tracts for example of the rectum and colon. In general terms the device advantageously comprises an elongated structure which develops between a proximal end and a distal end and which is suitable for being inserted within the anatomic structure to be examined. Moreover means for locally dilating the walls of the tubular structure associated with the distal end of the elongated structure are provided. The means for dilating are movable between a closed position for the introduction of the device and at least one open position for the viewing and the evaluation of the pathology.

The means for locally dilating are operatively connected with control means associated with the proximal end of the elongated structure. These control means are operated by the operator in order to open or close the dilating means.

In addition, visualising means suitable for being associated with the elongated structure and for reaching the tract dilated by the means of dilating are provided.

In general terms, applicable to whatsoever embodiment of the device according to the present invention, by proximal is conventionally meant a part or end of the device which, whilst in use, is near to the operator holding the device and carrying out the examination, whilst by distal is conventionally meant a part or end of the device which, whilst in use, is remote with respect to the operator carrying out the examination. Additionally, by the term advancement is meant a movement, preferably translation, carried out in the direction from the proximal end towards the distal end (for example along the arrow F of FIG. 2), whilst by withdrawal is meant a move-

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ment, preferably translation, carried out in the direction from the distal end towards the proximal end (for example along the arrow F' of FIG. 3).

In the following will be described some embodiments of such a device, for example with reference to the attached figures.

With reference to the FIGS. 1-4A, by 10 has been generally indicated a trans-anal diagnostic device according to a first possible embodiment.

By 12 has been indicated an inner tube, preferably cylindrical in shape and internally hollow. The inner tube 12 may be for example in semi-rigid or flexible material, for example in plastic material.

The inner tube 12 extends between a proximal end 12a and a distal end 12b. The proximal end 12a is operatively associated with a holding body 14, for example in the shape of a handle. According to one possible embodiment, on the proximal end 12a is inserted a fixing ferrule 16 adapted to being housed within a seat 18 of the holding body 14. Possible through holes 20 may be envisaged in the proximal end of the inner tube 12, in the fixing ferrule 16 and in the holding body 14 in order to make the three elements join together by suitable, not illustrated, means of fixing.

The distal end 12b of the inner tube is operatively associated with elastic or in any case expandable arms 22, which extend preferably in a longitudinal direction with respect to the inner tube 12. According to one possible embodiment, for example illustrated in the FIGS. 1-4A, the arms 22 are arranged in such a manner that their first end is fixed to the exterior wall of the inner tube 12 whilst a second end protrudes with respect to the distal end 12b of the inner tube 12.

According to one possible embodiment, starting from the distal end 12b of the inner tube 12, the external surface of the inner tube 12 has grooves 24, preferably longitudinal. Each groove is adapted to receiving at least one part of an arm 22. In the case in which the arms 22 have a rectangular shaped cross section, the grooves 24 have cross sections of analogous shape and size in order to receive at least one part of the aforementioned arms.

The arms 22 are suitable for assuming at least two extreme configurations corresponding to a closed configuration (FIG. 3) and a completely open configuration (FIG. 2). According to one possible embodiment, in the open configuration of the arms 22 each of them has a straight length 22a and a curved length 22b. The straight length is for example adapted to be fixed to the exterior wall of the inner tube 12.

The fixing of the arms 22 to the inner tube 12 may be made by any means, for example by gluing or welding.

The curved length of the arms is preferably such that the arms themselves in the open configuration define the framework of a substantially "cup-shaped" structure (FIG. 2). In addition the curved length of the arms 22 is preferably such that the arms themselves in the closed configuration define the framework of an "olive-shaped" or conical structure with a rounded tip (FIG. 3).

According to one possible embodiment, the arms 22 have, preferably within their interior, detection elements or radio-paque markers 25. For example all the arms 22, or only some of them, may have one or more markers 25 distributed along the length of the arm itself in order to measure the nature of the pathology encountered. As an example, in FIG. 4A the markers 25 have been shown in only one of the arms even if they may be provided on every arm and they may be provided in number and shape different from what has been shown.

According to one possible embodiment, a membrane 26 preferably made from plastic or foldable material is put on the distal end 12b of the inner tube 12 and exteriorly to the arms

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22. According to one possible embodiment, the membrane is made from transparent material.

By 28 has been generally indicated an outer tube preferably comprising a first part 30 and a second part 32. In the assembled configuration of the device 10, the outer tube 28 accepts the inner tube 12 inside it. Still with reference to the outer tube 28 it is possible to identify a proximal end indicated by 28a and a distal end indicated by 28b. According to one possible embodiment, the outer tube can be made of semi-rigid or flexible material, for example of plastic material.

According to one possible embodiment, the outer tube 28 may have one or more detection elements or markers 33, for example distributed along the length of the outer tube itself, in order to measure the length of penetration of the device inside the anus. According to one possible embodiment the markers 33 have the shape of circular rings arranged transversal to the tube and distributed along the length of the outer tube itself. In FIG. 4 have been shown as an example some markers 33 which could be provided in number and shape different from what has been shown.

An additional holding body 34 is operatively associated with the proximal end 28a of the outer tube 28. According to one possible embodiment, on the proximal end 28a of the outer tube 28 is inserted a fixing ferrule 36 adapted to being housed within a seat 38 of the additional holding body 34. Possibly, through holes 40 can be envisaged in the proximal end 28a of the outer tube 28, in the fixing ferrule 36 and in the additional holding body 34 in order to make the three elements join together by suitable, not illustrated, means of fixing.

The holding body 14 or handle has such a conformation as to be received inside the additional holding body 34 and to be able to slide longitudinally with respect to it when the device 10 is assembled.

Preferably the additional holding body 34 has a structure such as to identify two or more discrete positions of the holding body 14 or handle, for example corresponding to a closed, open and possibly intermediate position of the device 10. According to one possible embodiment for example illustrated in the FIGS. 1-4A, the additional holding body 34 comprises a setting ring 42 from which a curved wall 44 extends in a longitudinal direction with respect to the inner tube and the outer tube. According to one possible embodiment on the wall 44 are formed three circular ribs 46a, 46b, 46c which extend to form an incomplete circumference arch in such a manner as to receive and to allow the sliding of the handle 14. As a means of example by 46a has been indicated proximal ribbing, by 46b intermediate ribbing and by 46c distal ribbing, even if additional holding bodies with ribs differing in number, shape or arrangement can be envisaged.

With reference to the definition of the device according to the present invention, the inner tube and the outer tube define the elongated structure which develops between a proximal end and a distal end. The length of the elongated structure can vary. As a function of the materials with which the inner tube and the outer tube are made, the elongated structure can be semi-rigid or flexible. The arms 22 of the device 10 define means for locally dilating the walls of the anatomical structure of interest, associated with the distal end of the elongated structure. The control means comprise the inner tube and the outer tube which are slidable one with respect to and within the other and the means that cause this translation.

In the following is described the method of use of the embodiment of the above described diagnostic device.

The diagnostic device 10 is initially found in the closed position (FIG. 3), for example with the handle 14 located between the proximal ribbing 46a and the intermediate rib-

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bing **46b**, if present. The distal end of the outer tube **28** overlaps with the distal end of the inner tube **12**. As a consequence, the arms **22** have enclosed or deformed distal ends forming a substantially "olive like" shape with the corresponding membrane **26**.

The device **10** in the closed position is introduced transanally into the rectum/colon sigmoid/colon of the patient by the physician or the operator carrying out the examination. The degree of introduction of the device **10** can be verified using the radiopaque markers **33** on the outer tube **28**, if present. The insertion of the device **10** is assisted by the "olive like" shape of the distal tip of the device itself, i.e. of the arms **22**.

When the desired position is reached, the distal end of the device is opened "flower-like" in such a manner as to gradually enlarge the area of interest, as will be described in the following with reference to the embodiment in question.

The handle **14** is pushed towards the distal end of the device for example in such a manner to settle between the intermediate ribbing **46b** and the distal ribbing **46c**. In the meantime the additional holding body **34** is kept still with respect to the handle **14**. As a consequence, the inner tube **12** translates by advancing with respect to the outer tube **28** and its distal end **12a** begins to emerge with respect to the outer tube **28**. A distal part of the arms **22** and of the corresponding membrane **26** emerges from the outer tube **28** and is free to enlarge elastically at least until in an intermediately open position of the device **10**. In other words, the arms **22** initially maintained compressed by the outer tube **28** are free to expand, at least in correspondence with the part which is outside of the outer tube, consequently expanding the membrane **26**. By this action the stretching and dilation of the walls of the colon and rectum are obtained.

The handle **14** may be rotated with respect to an axis longitudinal to the device **10** in order to block the device itself in an intermediate open position and allow the inspection of the area of interest. For example, by rotating the handle **14**, the latter inserts itself at least partially between the intermediate ribbing **46b** and the distal ribbing **46c** in such a manner that the handle **14** and the inner tube **12** are not free to slide with respect to the additional holding body **34** and the outer tube **28**.

In order to further open the device up to the totally open position, the handle **14** is repositioned in such a manner as to allow it to slide with respect to the additional holding body **34** and the outer tube **28**. The handle **14** is pushed towards the distal end of the device **10**, for example until reaching the position between the distal ribbing **46c** and the setting ring **42** (FIG. 2), i.e. the totally open position. The distal end **12a** of the inner tube **12** emerges further from the distal end **28a** of the outer tube, freeing a greater distal part of the arms **22**. The latter are therefore able to enlarge themselves further towards the exterior with the corresponding membrane, until reaching a substantially "cup-shaped" configuration. In the case wherein the distal end **12a** of the inner tube emerges by a certain length from the distal end **28a** of the outer tube **28**, the free length of the inner tube defines a reaction surface for the arms **22** whilst the latter elongate themselves towards the exterior.

Even in this position, it is possible to block the handle **14** in order to allow the inspection of the area of interest, for example by rotating the handle as described above.

The above described operations in order to open the distal end of the device **10**, wherein pushing the handle **14** is envisaged and therefore the inner tube **12** with respect to the additional holding body **34** and the outer tube **28**, can be carried out analogously by pulling the additional holding body **34** and therefore the outer tube **28** toward the operator.

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The above described device **10** may be used in association with viewing equipment (for example laparoscopes) introduced into the inner tube **12** and which, thanks to the opening of the arms **22**, can be directed towards the appropriately enlarged area of interest in such a manner that the operator (physician) can check for the presence and the extent of the various pathologies. In other words the inner tube **12** allows the passage of illuminating and optical elements for the viewing of the area of interest.

Alternatively, the device **10** can be associated with an apparatus supplied with a colon-scope and insufflation device available from specialist medical practitioners.

By gradually and selectively enlarging the distal end of the device **10** it is for example possible to check the response by the mucosa whilst the patient mimes the process of defecation.

The present device allows the diagnosis of various pathologies amongst which intussusception, stenosis, prolapse, rectocele. The location and the dimensions of the defect can be quantified using the markers arranged on the device **10** and its arms **22**.

The device **10** can additionally be moved backwards or forwards during the opening and closing of the same in order to allow the analyses of the various sections of tissues and in order to diagnose the conditions of the prolapse.

The closing of the distal tip of the device **10** occurs analogously to that described above, obviously with operations contrary to those performed in the opening of the same. During the withdrawal of the inner tube **12** with respect to the outer tube **28** (arrow F' of FIG. 3), the outer tube gradually encloses the arms **22** refolding them until reaching the closed configuration. The membrane **26** contracts following the arms **22**.

From that above one can appreciate how envisaging a diagnostic device according to the present invention allows to have available a low cost device useful in the diagnosis of pathologies of tubular anatomical structures such as colorectal tracts. For example it is possible to identify and evaluate pathologies such as intestinal blockages, intussusception, stenosis, prolapse and rectocele.

The ability to carry out the diagnosis and quantification of a rectal prolapse is particularly advantageous given that the known devices, in particular colonoscopes, do not allow the diagnosis of such a pathology. Indeed colonoscopes require insufflation of air which provokes rectal dilation and consequently the disappearance of the mucosal prolapse.

Besides that above, the diagnostic device according to the present invention reduces patient discomfort and can be used even without the administration of sedatives, being much easier to introduce with respect to the known devices and does not require the insufflation of air.

An additional advantage of the diagnostic device according to the present invention is linked to the self-contained size in which it can be made, eliminating the drawbacks of the direct vision anosopes which are painful and require the relaxation of the sphincter in that they have rather larger dimensions.

Further to that above, the diagnostic device according to the present invention can also be used on an outpatient basis, or in any case in non hospital or clinical environments, being a simple structure, easy to use and having a low cost, and which does not require the administration of sedatives.

In particular the providing of a tip or head or distal end which is non traumatic both during insertion in the closed position and during use in the open position is particularly advantageous.

Furthermore, the risk that the tissue will sag or that it can be caught in the jaws of the device is minimised or even eliminated.

The variety of materials with which both the inner tube and the outer tube can be made also allows the attainment of a relatively flexible elongated structure, adapted to being easily introduced in particular up to the sigmoidal colon.

The use of radiopaque markers, both on the outer tube and on the arms allow respectively to quantify the depth of insertion of the device and to quantify the prolapse.

The conformation of the device allows, in the closed position, the limiting of the risk that extraneous elements can introduce themselves into the interior of the device itself.

The shape reached in the totally open position is particularly advantageous for initiating a response from the sphincter. In addition, the shape of the arms **22** is preferably designed so as to have maximum radial opening at the distal end of the device.

It is clear that variations and/or additions to that described and illustrated above can be envisaged.

With reference to the previously described embodiment, alternatively to how it is represented in the figures, the additional holding body **34** can be constituted by a setting ring **42** alone without envisaging areas corresponding to defined degrees of openness of the device. Alternatively, ribs differing in number to that illustrated may be envisaged in order to define one or more predefined positions.

The arms **22** can be arranged completely inside the outer tube **28**, when the device is found in the closed position, or protrude in a manner different to that illustrated. Furthermore, the inner tube **12** can be made in such a manner as to remain inside the outer tube **28** even in the completely open position of the device.

The fixing of the arms **22** or the membrane **26** to the inner tube **12** can be of various natures, for example without envisaging the grooving **24** or by envisaging it in a different shape to that illustrated.

The outer tube can be made in a single piece rather than in two parts as is illustrated.

The fixing between the inner tube **12** and the handle **14** (and possibly the fixing ferrule **16**) or between the outer tube **28** and the additional holding body **34** (and possibly the fixing ferrule **36**) can be of various natures even different to that illustrated.

The shape, both of the inner tube and of the outer tube can vary with respect to that described and illustrated.

The elastic or in any case expandable arms **22** due to the inherent characteristics of the materials with which they have been made can also be associated with other types of translation control for the inner tube **12** with respect to the outer tube **28**. For example rotating controls or geared controls can be used analogous to those which will be described in the following with reference to additional embodiments of the diagnostic device according to the present invention.

Analogously, the control with a handle for the translation of the inner tube **12** with respect to the outer tube **28** may be used with different embodiments of the distal end, for example with rigid or elastic petals analogous to those which will be described in the following with reference to additional embodiments of the diagnostic device according to the present invention.

FIGS. 5-10 illustrate a possible additional embodiment of the diagnostic device according to the present invention. For simplicity of presentation, the diagnostic device shown in the FIGS. 5-10 has been generally indicated by the reference number **100**.

By **102** an inner tube of preferably cylindrical shape and hollow inside has been indicated. The inner tube **102** is for example made from semi-rigid or flexible material, for example plastic material.

The inner tube **102** extends between a proximal end **102a** and a distal end **102b**. According to one possible embodiment, a part of the external surface of the inner tube **102** has a threaded length **104** close to the proximal end **102a**. According to one possible embodiment a part of the external surface of the inner tube **102** has a circular groove **106** close to the distal end **102b**.

The wall defining the inner tube **102** has in addition at least one aperture **108** elongated according to a longitudinal direction to the tube itself. In the example shown, two diametrically opposed rectangular apertures **108** are envisaged with their longer sides parallel to the longitudinal axis of the inner tube **102**. Preferably the apertures **108** are formed in a proximal section of the inner tube **102** comprised between a threaded length **104** and the distal end **102b**.

A proximal section of the inner tube **102** is operatively associated with a holding body **110**, for example in the form of a knob.

The knob **110** comprises a first part **112** and a second part **114** associated with each other in such a manner that the second part **114** can rotate with respect to the first (arrow F" of FIGS. 6, 8, 9). According to one possible embodiment, the second part **114** comprises a flange **116** adapted to being housed within a circular seat **118** of the first part **112**. According to one possible embodiment, the first part **112** is made in two semi-hulls adapted to being fixed, one with respect to the other, on the inner tube **102**.

By **120** has been indicated a fin formed in the interior wall of the first part **112** and extending towards the inside of the holding body **110**. The fin **120** is adapted to being inserted into the corresponding aperture **108** of the inner tube **102** remaining free to slide longitudinally for a length inside it. In the case that two apertures **108** are envisaged, analogously, two fins **120** are envisaged each adapted to being inserted into the respective aperture. In the case in which the first part **112** of the holding body **110** is made in two semi-hulls, advantageously each semi-hull comprises a fin **120**.

The second part **114** comprises at least one pivot **122** which extends in a transverse direction with respect to the longitudinal development of the inner tube **102** and of the holding body **110**, towards the interior of the second part itself. Preferably, two pivots **122** are envisaged arranged in diametrically opposite areas of the second part **114**. According to one possible embodiment, the pivot **122** is inserted into a seat **124** on the second part **114** in such a manner as to protrude inside the second part itself. The end of the pivot **122** which extends inside the second part **114** is adapted to engage with the threaded length **104** of the inner tube **102**.

By **126** has been indicated an outer tube adapted to positioning itself over the inner tube **102** at the level of a distal part of the inner tube itself. Also with reference to the outer tube **126** it is possible to identify a proximal end indicated by **126a** and a distal end indicated by **126b**. According to one possible embodiment, the outer tube **126** is for example made of semi-rigid or flexible material, for example plastic material.

According to one possible embodiment, the outer tube **126** can have one or more detection elements or markers **128**, for example distributed along the length of the outer tube itself in order to quantify the length of penetration of the instrument inside the anus. According to one possible embodiment, the markers **128** are in the shape of rings transversally arranged with respect to the outer tube and distributed along its length. In FIGS. 6 and 7 as an example some markers have been

shown even if they could be provided in shape, number and arrangement different from what has been illustrated.

According to one possible embodiment, the proximal end **126a** of the outer tube **126** has a flange **130** adapted to being housed within a circular seat **132** formed within the holding body **110**, in particular within the first part **112**.

According to one possible embodiment, the outer tube **126** has apertures **134** distributed along one circumference arranged in proximity to the distal end **126b** of the outer tube itself. Each aperture **134** has one notch **136** which extends for example from a proximal edge of the aperture **134** towards a distal edge of the same.

The distal ends of the inner tube **102** and the outer tube **126** are operatively associated with petals **138** which preferably extend in a longitudinal direction with respect to the device **100**.

According to one possible embodiment, the petals **138** are arranged in such a manner that their first end is associated with the distal end of the inner tube and the outer tube whilst a second end protrudes with respect to the aforementioned end.

The petals **138** are adapted to assuming at least two extreme configurations corresponding to a closed configuration and a completely open configuration.

According to one possible embodiment, a petal **138** comprises an arm **140** which broadens into a curved surface **142**. The arm **140** has an end part **144** which refolds itself by almost 90° with respect to the development of the arm and wherein an aperture **146** is formed. According to one possible embodiment, the curved surface **142** has an asymmetric conformation with respect to the arm **140**, with a side extension **148** in a transverse direction with respect to the longitudinal development of the device **100**.

The end part **144** of the arm **140** is adapted to being housed within the circular groove **106** of the inner tube **102**. Furthermore, the arm **140** is adapted to being inserted into one of the apertures **134** of the outer tube **126**, with the notch **136** which inserts inside the aperture **146** of the arm **140**.

According to one possible embodiment, the petals **138** have, preferably at their interior, detection elements or radio-paque markers **150**. For example all the petals **138**, or only some of them, can have one or more markers **150** distributed along the length of the petal itself in order to measure the nature of the pathology encountered. For example the markers **150** have been shown in one of the petals even if they may be provided on every petals or only in some of them. Moreover as an example the markers have been shown as lines transversal to the development of the petals and distributed along the length of the petal itself even if they may be provided in number, shape and arrangement different from what has been shown as an example.

According to one possible embodiment, a membrane **152** preferably made of an elastic or foldable material is placed over the distal end **126b** of the outer tube **126** and externally to the petals **138**. According to one possible embodiment, the membrane is made from transparent material.

In the assembled and closed configuration of the device **100**, the petals **138** overlap each other, in particular the extension **148** of a petal positions itself externally to the curved surface **142** of the immediately adjacent petal.

According to one possible embodiment an introductory element **154** can be inserted into the inner tube **102** until protruding slightly from the distal part of the device. The distal end of the introductory element **154** has a conical conformation or is in any case adapted to limiting patient discomfort.

With reference to the definition of the device according to the present invention, the inner tube and the outer tube define the elongated structure which develops between a proximal end and a distal end. The length of the elongated structure can vary. As a function of the material with which the inner tube and the outer tube are made, the elongated structure can be semi-rigid or flexible. The petals **138** define the means for locally dilating the walls of the tubular anatomical structure associated with the distal end of the elongated structure. The control means comprise the inner tube and the outer tube which may slide one in respect to the other and one within the other and the means which cause this translation.

The method of use of the embodiment of the above described diagnostic device will be described in the following. In general terms, it is analogous to that of the previously described embodiment. In other words, the relative translation of the inner tube and of the outer tube gradually change the configuration of the distal end of the device from a closed configuration (FIG. **8**) to a completely open configuration (FIG. **9**) and vice versa.

In the above described embodiment, the relative translation between the inner tube and the outer tube is obtained by making the second part **114** of the holding body **110** rotate with respect to the first part **112** whilst the operator firmly holds the first part **112**. During the rotation of the second part **114**, the pivots **122** which are engaged within the threaded length **104** of the inner tube cause its translation with respect to the outer tube in advancement or withdrawal (arrows **F** and **F'** of FIGS. **6**, **8**, **9**) as a function of the direction of rotation of the first part **114** (arrow **F''** of FIGS. **6**, **8**, **9**). The rotation of the inner tube **102** is impeded by the coupling between the fins **120** of the holding body **110** and the apertures **108** of the inner tube **102**. The greater longitudinal extension of the aperture **108** with respect to that of the fins **120** instead allows the translation of the inner tube **102** with respect to the holding body **110** and the outer tube **126**.

The relative translation between the outer tube **126** and the inner tube **102** causes the rotation of the petals **138** around a fulcrum constituted by the notches **136**. In other words, making the inner tube advance in order to open the petals, the end part **144** of the petals **138** is drawn forward by the interaction with the circular groove **106** of the inner tube **102** with the consequence that the petal rotates around the respective notch **136** (arrow **F'''** of FIG. **9**).

Analogously, the withdrawal of the inner tube **102** with respect to the outer tube **126** draws the end sections **144** of the petals **138** and causes its rotation around the respective notches **136** (arrow **F''''** of FIG. **8**).

Detection elements **156** may be envisaged on the first part **112** and on the second part **114** in order to define at least one configuration of the device **100**.

The mode of application and the introduction and viewing methodology is analogous to that described for the first embodiment illustrated (FIGS. **1-4A**). In the case in which use of the introductory element **154** is envisaged, the latter is extracted from the diagnostic device **100** following positioning in order to allow the passage of the means of viewing.

The advantages set forth above are also valid for the additional above described embodiment. Furthermore, the presence of rigid petals adapted to being made to rotate in order to stretch and widen the walls of the colon/rectum makes the operability of the device independent of the elasticity of the materials used for the arms **22**.

It is clear that variations and/or additions to that described and shown above may be envisaged.

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The apertures **108** of the inner tube **102** or the apertures **146** of the petals **138** may also not be passing through the entire thickness of the material as has been illustrated.

The coupling between the threaded length **104** and the second part **114** can be made by means other than the pivots **122** illustrated.

The petals **138** as described and their coupling to the distal end of the inner tube and the outer tube can also be envisaged with other control means for the relative translation between the inner tube and the outer tube. For example means analogous to the first embodiment illustrated (FIGS. 1-4) or means analogous to the embodiment which will be subsequently described may be envisaged.

Analogously, the means which control the relative translation between the inner tube and the outer tube such as described above can be associated with different means in order to enlarge the distal end of the device. For example arms analogous to those described in the first embodiment (FIGS. 1-4) or petals analogous to those which will be described in the following with reference to an additional embodiment of the diagnostic device may be envisaged.

With reference to FIGS. 11-17, a possible additional embodiment of the diagnostic device according to the present invention is illustrated. For simplicity of presentation, the diagnostic device illustrated in the FIGS. 11-17 has been generally indicated by the reference **200**.

By **202** has been indicated an inner tube of preferably cylindrical shape and internally hollow. The inner tube **202** is for example made from semi-rigid or flexible material, for example in plastic material.

The inner tube **202** extends between a proximal end **202a** and a distal end **202b**. According to one possible embodiment, a part of the external surface of the inner tube **102** has a proximal grooved length **204** or a threaded length in proximity to the proximal end **202a**. According to one possible embodiment a part of the external surface of the inner tube **202** has a distal grooved length **206** or a threaded length in proximity to the distal end **202b**.

A proximal part of the inner tube **202** is operatively associated with a holding body **208**, for example in the shape of a pistol.

The pistol **208** comprises a support structure **210**, for example formed from two semi-hulls, which house a trigger **212**. This latter is riveted into the support structure **210** and kept in the resting position, corresponding to the closed position of the device **200**, by spring means **214**, for example a helical spring. The trigger **212** comprises a toothed area **216** adapted to coupling with the grooved length **204** of the inner tube **202**.

By **218** has been indicated an outer tube adapted to positioning itself over the inner tube **202** at the level of a distal part of the inner tube itself. Also with reference to the outer tube **218** it is possible to identify one proximal end indicated by **218a** and one distal end indicated by **218b**. According to one possible embodiment, the outer tube **218** is made from semi-rigid or flexible material, for example in plastic material.

According to one possible embodiment, the outer tube **218** may have one or more detection elements or markers **220**, for example distributed along the length of the outer tube itself in order to quantify the length of penetration of the device inside the anus. In the figures as an example have been shown markers having the shape of rings transversal to the longitudinal development of the tube and distributed along its length even if they could be provided in number, shape and arrangement different from what has been illustrated.

According to one possible embodiment, the proximal end **218a** of the outer tube **218** has a flange **222** adapted to being

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housed within a circular seat **224** formed within the holding body **208**, in particular within the supporting structure **210**.

According to one possible embodiment, the outer tube **218** has apertures **226** (FIG. 16), for example longitudinal, distributed along the perimeter of the distal end **218b**. According to one possible embodiment, the distal part of the outer tube **218** involved with the apertures **226** is of truncated conical shape, with the larger diameter located at the distal end **218b** of the outer tube **218**. according to one possible embodiment, seats **228** (FIG. 16) formed at the level of the edges opposite the apertures **226** are envisaged.

The distal ends of the inner tube **202** and the outer tube **218** are operatively associated with the petals **230** which extend preferably in a longitudinal direction with respect to the device **200**.

According to one possible embodiment, the petals **230** are arranged in such a manner that their first end is associated with the distal ends of the inner tube and the outer tube whilst a second end protrudes with respect to the aforementioned ends.

The petals **230** are adapted to assuming at least two extreme configurations corresponding to a closed configuration (FIG. 13) and to an open configuration (FIG. 14).

According to one possible embodiment, a petal **230** comprises an arm **232** which broadens into a curved surface **234**. According to one possible embodiment, the curved surfaces of the petals extend transversally in such a manner as to not overlap each other reciprocally when the device finds itself in the open position.

The arm **232** has an end position **236** which comprises a toothed area **238** (FIG. 15). According to one possible embodiment, at the level of the end part **236** of the petal **230** a pivot **240** is envisaged which extends transversally towards the arm **232** from both sides of the petal itself.

The end part **236** of the arm **232** is adapted to being housed within an aperture **226** of the outer tube **218**, preferably in such a manner that the pivot **240** is housed within the respective seats **228**. In addition the toothed area **238** is adapted to coupling with the distal grooved length **204** of the inner tube **202**.

According to one possible embodiment, the petals **230** have identifying elements or radiopaque markers **244** preferably in their interior. For example all the petals **230**, or only some of them, can have one or more markers **244** distributed along the length of the petal itself in order to measure the nature of the pathology encountered. For example the markers **244** have been shown in only one of the petals and they have been shown as lines transversal to the development of the petals and distributed along the length of the petal itself. Obviously markers arranged on all the petals or only on some of them or markers made in shape, number or arrangement different from what has been shown could be provided.

According to one possible embodiment, a membrane **246** preferably made from elastic or refoldable material is placed over the distal end **218b** of the outer tube **218** and externally to the petals **230**, thus finishing the "cup" shape of the distal and in the open configuration. According to one possible embodiment, the membrane is made of transparent material.

According to one possible embodiment an introductory element, not shown, can be inserted into the inner tube **202** until protruding slightly from the distal part of the device. The distal end of the introductory element has a conical conformation or is however adapted to limiting patient discomfort.

With reference to the definition of the device according to the present invention, the inner tube and **15** the outer tube define the elongated structure which develops between a proximal end and a distal end. The length of the elongated

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structure can vary. As a function of the materials with which the inner tube and the outer tube are made, the elongated structure can be semi-rigid **20** or flexible. The petals **230** define the means for locally dilating the walls of the tubular anatomical structure associated with the distal end of the elongated structure. The control means comprises the inner tube and the outer tube which can slide one with respect to the other and one within the other and the means which cause this translation.

The mode of use of the embodiment of the above described diagnostic device is described in the following. In general terms it is analogous to that of the previously described embodiment. In other words, the relative translation of the inner tube and the outer tube gradually alter the configuration of the distal end of the device from a closed configuration (FIG. **13**) to a completely open configuration (FIG. **14**), and vice versa.

In the above described embodiment, the relative translation between the inner tube and the outer tube is obtained by making the trigger **212** which couples with the grooved length **204** of the inner tube **202** rotate. As a function of the direction of rotation of the trigger the advancement or withdrawal (arrow F or F') of the inner tube with respect to the outer tube and respectively the opening or closure of the petals **230** is obtained.

The relative translation between the outer tube and the inner tube causes the rotation of the petals **230** around the pivot **240**, caused by the coupling between the distal grooved length **206** and the toothed area **238** of the petals **230**. In other words, by making the inner tube advance in order to open the petals, the end section **236** of the petals **230**, and in particular the toothed area **238** is made to rotate by the interaction with the additional grooved length **206** of the inner tube **202** with the consequence that the petal rotates around the respective pivot **240** (F''').

Analogously, by releasing the trigger **212**, the latter is recalled by the spring means **214** causing the withdrawal of the inner tube **202** with respect to the outer tube **218**. Such relative translation causes the rotation of the toothed area **238** of the petals **230** causing its rotation around the respective pivot **240** (F''').

The mode of application and the introduction and viewing methodology is analogous to that described for the first and second embodiment previously illustrated and described. In the case in which the use of the introductory element is envisaged, this latter is extracted from the diagnostic device **200** following positioning in order to allow the passage of the means of viewing.

The advantages set forth above also find validity in the additional above described embodiment. In addition, the presence of rigid petals adapted to being made to rotate in order to stretch and widen the walls of the colon/rectum make the operation of the device independent of the elasticity of the materials used for the arms **22**.

It is evident that variants and/or additions to that described and illustrated above can be envisaged.

The petals **230** can be for example analogous to the petals **138** of the second embodiment (FIGS. **5-11**). In particular, a curved surface **234** extends from the arm **232** having an asymmetrical conformation with respect to the arm itself, with a side extension **242** in a transverse direction with respect to the longitudinal development of the device **200**. In the assembled and closed configuration of the device **200**, the petals **230** overlap one another, in particular the extension **242** of each petal is arranged externally to the curved surface **234** of the petal immediately adjacent. As a consequence, in the

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assembled and open configuration of the device, the petals themselves define the "cup-shaped" conformation of the distal end.

The petals **230** as described thus and in their coupling with the distal end of the inner tube and the outer tube can also be envisaged with other control means for the relative translation between the inner tube and the outer tube. For example, means analogous to the first or to the second embodiment illustrated may be envisaged.

Analogously, the means which control the relative translation between the inner tube and the outer tube as thus described above can be associated with different means for enlarging the distal end of the device. For example, arms analogous to those described in the first embodiment (FIGS. **1-4A**) or petals analogous to those described in the second embodiment may be envisaged.

With reference to the FIGS. **18-21**, there is illustrated a possible further embodiment of the distal end of the diagnostic device according to the present invention. For simplicity of presentation, the diagnostic device shown in FIGS. **18-21** has been overall indicated with the numeral **300**.

By **302** has been designated an inner tube preferably of a cylindrical shape and hollow therein. The inner tube **302** may be for example in a semi-rigid or flexible material, for example in plastic material.

The inner tube **302** extends between a proximal end, not shown, and a distal end **302b**.

By **304** has been designated an outer tube **20** suitable to be arranged on the inner tube **302** at at least one distal portion of the inner tube. Also with reference to the outer tube **304** it is possible to identify a proximal end, not shown, and a distal end designated by **304b**. According to a possible embodiment, the outer tube **304** is made in a semi-rigid or flexible material, for example in plastic material.

According to a possible embodiment, the outer tube **304** is made in a semi-rigid or flexible material, for example in plastic material.

According to a possible embodiment, the outer tube **304** may have one or more detection elements or markers **306**, for example distributed along the length of the outer tube itself, in order to measure the length of penetration of the device inside the anus. According to a possible embodiment, the markers **306** have the shape of circular rings arranged transversal to the outer tube and distributed along the length thereof. The markers **306** may however be provided in shape, number and arrangement different from what has been illustrated.

The distal ends of the inner tube **302** and the outer tube **304** are operatively associated to petals **308**, which extend preferably in a longitudinal direction relative to the device **300**.

According to a possible embodiment, the petals **308** are arranged such that a first end thereof is associated with the distal ends of the inner tube and the outer tube while a second end protrudes relative to said ends. Particularly, the petals **308** are made as one piece with the outer tube **304**. In other words, the outer tube **304** extends to form the petals **308**.

The petals **308** are adapted to assuming at least two extreme configurations corresponding to a closed configuration and a completely open configuration.

According to a possible embodiment, each petal **308** couples with a portion of the inner tube **302** forming a unidirectional guide adapted to close or open the petals subsequent to the translation of the inner tube relative to the outer tube and the petals.

According to a possible embodiment, each petal comprises a longitudinally extended rib **310** and the inner tube **302** comprises a distal flange **312** provided with openings **314** adapted to couple with respective ribs **310** of the petals. In

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other words, the petals **308** and the inner tube **302** mutually couple by means of a shape coupling defining a restraint adapted to leave only one degree of freedom corresponding to the relative translation between the inner tube and the petals.

According to a possible embodiment, the rib **310** has a T-shaped cross section and the openings **314** have a C-shaped cross section suitable to couple with the cross-section of a respective rib **310**.

In accordance with a possible embodiment, the petals **308** have, preferably at their interior, detection elements or radiopaque markers **316**. For example, all the petals **308**, or only some of them, can have one or more markers **316** distributed along the length of the petal itself in order to measure the nature of the pathology encountered. By way of example, in FIG. **18** there have been represented several markers **316** only on one of petals **308**. The markers **316** may be however provided either on all petals or only on some of them. Furthermore, the markers **316** have been represented as lines transversal to the development of the petal and distributed along the length of the petal, though they may be provided in number and shape different from what has been shown.

In accordance with a possible embodiment, not shown, a membrane preferably made of an elastic or foldable material is placed over the distal end of the outer tube **304** and externally to the petals **308**, thus finishing the “cup” shape of the distal end in the open configuration. According to a possible embodiment, the membrane is made in transparent material.

With reference to the definition of the device according to the present invention, the inner tube and the outer tube define the elongated structure developing between a proximal end and a distal end. The length of the elongated structure may vary. As a function of the material with which the inner tube and the outer tube are made, the elongated structure can be either semi-rigid or flexible. The petals **308** define the means for locally dilating the walls of the tubular anatomical structure associated with the distal end of the elongated structure. The control means comprise the inner tube and the outer tube which can slide one inside the other and the means which cause this relative translation.

The method for employing the embodiment of the above diagnostic device is described below. Generally, this is similar to the embodiments described above. In other words, the relative translation of the inner tube and the outer tube gradually change the configuration of the distal end of the device from a closed configuration to a completely open configuration and vice versa.

In the embodiment described above, the relative translation between the inner tube and the outer tube can be obtained by any means, for example using the means described in the other embodiments described.

The relative translation between the outer tube and the inner tube causes the distal flange **312** to slide relative to the petals, along the ribs **310**. The petals are made of a resilient material such as to follow the movement of the inner tube. Particularly, the restraint between the inner tube and the petals causes the petals to approach each other and close while the inner tube is moving forward relative to the outer tube or the petals and, similarly, the petals to move apart and open while the tube is moving backward relative to the outer tube or the petals.

The application mode and method for introduction and visualization is similar to that described above for the previous embodiments. The advantages set forth above are also found in the further embodiment described above.

It should be understood that variations and/or additions to what has been described and illustrated above may be provided.

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The shape of the petals may be different, for example similar to the petals **138** of the second embodiment (FIGS. **5-11**). Furthermore, the coupling between the petals and the inner tube may come in a different shape, for example swallow-tailed or with other shape couplings allowing the inner tube and the petals to translate relative to each other.

Furthermore, the petals may not be formed as one piece with the outer tube and mounted on the distal end of the outer tube such as to open and close while the inner tube is moving forward or backward.

The petals **308** such as described and their coupling with the distal end of the inner tube and the outer tube can be also provided with other command or control means for the relative translation between the inner tube and the outer tube. For example, means similar to the other embodiments shown may be provided.

With reference to all the embodiments shown and described, there may be provided different means adapted to change the configuration of the means for locally dilating the walls of the tubular structure. For example, different means from an inner tube and an outer tube that can be relatively translated in order to change the configuration of the means for locally dilating the walls of the tubular structure.

To the preferred embodiments of the diagnostic device such as described above, those skilled in the art, aiming at satisfying contingent and specific requirements, may carry out a number of modifications, adaptations and replacement of elements with others functionally equivalent, without however departing from the scope of the claims below.

The invention claimed is:

1. A diagnostic device for pathologies of naturally occurring tubular anatomical structures comprising:

a tubular elongated structure developing between a proximal end and a distal end and being adapted to be inserted in the tubular anatomical structure,

wherein said elongated structure comprises an inner tube and an outer tube adapted to internally receive said inner tube,

means for locally dilating the walls of the tubular anatomical structure being associated with the distal end of said elongated structure, said means for locally dilating being movable between a closed position for the introduction of the device and at least one open position for the viewing and evaluation of the pathology,

wherein said means for locally dilating comprise petals being arranged such that one first end thereof is associated to the distal end of the elongated tubular structure, said petals being adapted to assume at least one closed configuration and one open configuration,

said inner tube and said outer tube being suitable to translate relatively to each other to open or close said petals, control means being associated to the proximal end of the elongated structure, said control means being operatively connected to said means for locally dilating in order to move them between the closed position and the open position, and vice versa,

wherein the outer tube comprises a thickened portion adjacent a proximal end thereof, and wherein in the region of the petals, the outer tube comprises a thinned portion that extends distally to form said petals and a flexure hinge at said first end of the petals in which the outer tube and the petals form together one continuous external surface, and each of said petals is coupled with a portion of said inner tube forming a unidirectional guide adapted to close or open the petals in response to the translation of the inner tube relative to the outer tube and the petals, and

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wherein each petal comprises a longitudinally extending rib, and wherein said inner tube comprises a distal flange provided with openings through which respective ribs of said petals are displaced.

2. The diagnostic device according to claim 1, further comprising means of viewing adapted to be associated with the elongated tubular structure and reach the tract of the tubular anatomical structure dilated by the means of dilating.

3. The diagnostic device according to claim 2, wherein the elongated tubular structure is internally hollow in order to receive the means of viewing.

4. The diagnostic device according to the claim 1, wherein one of the petals comprises at least one detection element or marker.

5. The diagnostic device according to claim 1, further comprising a membrane being externally arranged on the petals.

6. The diagnostic device according to claim 5, wherein said membrane is made in an elastic material.

7. The diagnostic device according to claim 5, wherein said membrane is made in a transparent material.

8. The diagnostic device according to claim 1, wherein an outer surface of the outer tube comprises at least one detection element or marker.

9. The diagnostic device according to claim 1, wherein said rib has a T-shaped cross-section and wherein said openings have a C-shaped cross-section suitable to couple with the cross-section of a respective rib.

10. The diagnostic device according to one of claim 1, wherein said inner tube comprises a holding body arranged at a proximal end of the inner tube and wherein said outer tube comprises a further holding body being arranged at a proximal end of the outer tube.

11. The diagnostic device according to claim 1, wherein said elongated structure is configured such that forward movement of said inner tube relative to said outer tube serves to close said petals.

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12. A diagnostic device for pathologies of naturally occurring tubular anatomical structures comprising:

a tubular elongated structure developing between a proximal end and a distal end and being adapted to be inserted in the tubular anatomical structure, the tubular elongated structure including an inner tube and an outer tube, wherein the inner tube is received within the outer tube;

a plurality of petals formed circumferentially at a distal end of the outer tube such that the outer tube and the petals form together one continuous external surface, the petals being displaceable between a closed position for the introduction of the device and an open position for the viewing and evaluation of the pathology, wherein the inner tube and the outer tube are suitable to translate relatively to each other to open or close the petals; and

a control mechanism associated to the proximal end of the elongated structure, the control mechanism being cooperable with the inner tube and the outer tube to displace the inner tube relative to the outer tube,

wherein the outer tube is configured to define a flexure hinge for the petals, and wherein each of the petals comprises a longitudinally extending rib connected to and extending over a majority of a length of the petals and adapted to close or open the petals in response to translation of the inner tube relative to the outer tube and the petals.

13. The diagnostic device according to claim 12, wherein the outer tube comprises a thickened portion adjacent a proximal end thereof, and wherein the outer tube comprises a thinned portion that extends distally to form the petals and the flexure hinge.

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